



# CITY OF EAST LANSING

The Home of Michigan State University

September 27, 2013

Senate Office Building  
Lansing, MI

Regarding: Senate Bill 313

Dear Committee Members:

I represent the City of East Lansing as the Housing and University Relations Administrator. My core responsibility with the City is to administer the rental license program for the City. For the past 18 years I have worked in some capacity with rental property in East Lansing, witnessing some great properties and some of the most dangerous.

The City of East Lansing is proud to be home to one of our largest and finest universities, with one of the largest undergraduate populations in the country. However, this does present us with unique challenges in trying to assure that a large number of young adults, living on their own for the first time, are residing in safe and blight free residences. Approximately 66% of the residential units in East Lansing are rental, with the majority of those being rented by young adults living away from family for the first time.

The majority of rental units in the City of East Lansing change tenants every 9 to 12 months. Due to the nature of the rental cycle in East Lansing, large populations of tenants move at approximately the same time posing a challenge for property owners to be able to adequately prepare units for the incoming tenants. Most of the rental houses are some of the oldest housing stock in the City, ranging anywhere from 40 to 90 years old. These houses typically are licensed to have 4 or more unrelated people living in them. For many of these reasons East Lansing inspects and renews most rental licenses annually.

Mandating that inspections be limited to not less than 6 years and no longer than 10 years would dramatically increase the risk of unsafe situations in many of our rental units, leaving many young people vulnerable to danger. You may wonder, what could be so dangerous? As an example, during a 12 month period our inspectors have cited 366 incidences of non functioning smoke alarms, 25 exit sign violations, 166 incidences of hazardous material, 5 non-functioning fire alarm systems and 240 violations of improper means of egress. Keep in mind these violations are found at inspections where the tenants and property managers both have had adequate notice that an inspector is coming to make an inspection and we had just been there a year ago! Even in the cases of highly responsible

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property managers, tenants can quickly change the environment in which they reside. In addition to these numbers hundreds of violations are cited for numerous other code violations ranging from electrical and plumbing issues to windows that do not open, doors not working, holes in walls, broken handrails on stairways, broken guards on balconies. One can only imagine what these numbers would be if we only inspected every 6 – 10 years.

If we inspected every six years, how often would items that needed prompt repair be left undone? Last spring we received a complaint from a tenant that the basement of the house he and his roommates rented was leaking water to the point of the floor being wet all the time. To illustrate his point he took a video and sent it to us with his complaint. Sure enough a few trickles of water along the basement wall and one very small hole where the water came through looking like a drinking fountain, to the point that you could hear the water. This was an old unfinished basement; however, used for storage and the washer and dryer area. The tenants had asked the owner to repair the leaks and they did bring in a dehumidifier and two fans that ran all day and night. Guess who pays the electric. When I called the property manager his response was they didn't really want to spend money for the appropriate repair because they hoped to redevelop that area some day. The problem is that I had heard that for the past 10 years regarding that particular area and the owner did not have any redevelopment plans submitted. We had to send a violation letter to get some action. If we were to inspect these 70+ year old houses every 10 years in this area one can only imagine what condition we would find, with tenants that change every year and no way to document reoccurring issues.

Two photos are attached of an obviously messy house. The inspector had gone out for a reinspection of violations found at an annual inspection. The owner, property manger and tenants knew the day and time the inspector was coming. However, as you can see by the photos they did not feel the need to clean up for his reinspection. One of the complaints of more than one tenant was that they had mice. You can imagine that they probably did.

The last two photos are of a bathroom and bedroom in an apartment where the property manager requested that the inspector specifically inspect the apartment unit in an effort to assist the property manager in documenting the condition of the apartment. Of course people can live in a messy environment; however, notice the candle on the bathroom counter. In an apartment with this much debris the fire danger is increased also endangering other occupants of the apartment building.

Our inspectors work closely with our Fire Marshall and Fire Inspector. Every year without fail housing inspectors come across smoke detectors that have been tampered with so that they will not operate properly. Every year they find cases where smoke detectors are covered up in preparation for the party to be held where potentially hundreds of young adults will be drinking in a property where

they may not know the potential dangers of the non working smoke alarms. We work hard to mitigate the risks of potentially dangerous situations in our college town. We have all read those headlines where a young life full of potential for the future was cut short by some unintentional action causing a tragedy.

Our inspectors take pride in the fact that they want to be a service to the property owners and a resource when needed. Many of our inspectors routinely receive calls from maintenance personnel and property owners asking about different ways something can be repaired, what the pros and cons may be of a particular type of repair, etc. Our housing inspectors will go to our trades inspectors and fire inspector to collaborate on research to help with problems in the field in order to help a property owner. If you pass SB313 housing departments are forced to charge fees that will not cover the costs of inspections, research, time involved in administering the program, the costs associated with producing violation and compliance correspondence. This will have a crippling effect on the ability of a department to be able to adequately serve its customers. Departments simply will not have the resources to support the personnel needed to adequately assist customers.

If the attempt of this bill is to shift the cost of rental inspections from the rental property owners to the general taxpayer most communities will no longer be able to afford regulation of rental property allowing substandard housing to increase. A bill with this intent is damaging and will not protect the general population of our communities.

Every community has its own unique challenges that they face in these tough economic times. This bill will only increase these challenges and lead to a higher risk of fires, substandard living conditions and blighted neighborhoods. Please vote to remove this bill from further consideration.



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Planning, Building and Development  
City of East Lansing

Attachments



05/12/2005





Not  
Be  
To  
Drink

In Case  
Of  
Emergency  
Call  
911

05/12/2005



